Miss Weston

Dublin, Dec. 31. 1861

My dear Friend

Your letters are always welcome, but the latter was quite unexpected for I feared that an accident had happened to the envelope to which it was partly a reply, & that you had never rec'd it. I was glad to get another of your old fashioned letters, but I admit that the contents were far from exhilarating. Although your opinions are very positive, I do not think you have had sufficient grounds for forming a reliable estimate of the English people. Your intercourse with them has been peculiarly one sided, and entirely among that aristocratic & upper commercial class who have been most exposed to evil influences. I mean by evil influences the society and sentiments of that immense proportion of travelled Americans, both North & South, who, as you well know, are not & never until lately have in any way affected to be abolitionists. I dont see how it was possible that the letters of those respectable, well dressed, well introduced, & frequently accomplished & well educated multitude of parlaying lecturers, preachers, instructors, dilettenatos could fail in producing a powerful influence where ever they had access. They had on their number and apparent disinterestedness & handsome faces

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any shades of cant or twaddle, an immense advantage over the handful of abolitionists who were often far more disliked or suspected for their heresy than respected for their sacrifices or philanthropy. Not now but at all times since I understood the nature & influence of American proslavery policy, I have insisted that if it were only for our moral safety we should do what we could to stem the tide of transatlantic proslavery propagandism which would inevitably spread throughout our whole community if not checked. It has been as I feared. The very classes you know most of in England are those who having been most exposed to the contamination have suffered most from it. Writers for the press, literary men & those classes to whom travelled Americans have most looked for and obtained aid.

That many of our newspapers have shown proslavery affinities & therefore southern tendencies is true. How could it be helped with such & so much proslavery teaching, I do not see. They have doubtless been provoked by the hatred & contempt of England which American papers exhibit & have been in the habit of exhibiting in far greater quantity & of still more objectionable tone & quality. I have been assured in private letters that this popular sentiment is & has been deeply rooted, prevalent & rancorous to a degree which nothing in the general intercourse of the two nations would warrant — but which is in my opinion the natural result of the events

which preceded & attended the revolutionary war having been kept alive in the popular mind by commemorations, celebrations, speeches, & self laudatory orations which whenever they are kept up are an institution have an important moral influence — which may be traced in the disasters & ill success, which have attended in the present struggle. In the revolutionary war there millions of colonists baffled the powers of England for they were in possession of a wild unsettled country & they were united in their opposition to an alien yoke. The Southerners are nearly three fold in number, they have at least three millions of unarmed helpless negroes to do their rough work, they are at least as united in their sentiments, & they hate their opponents far more bitterly than your forefathers hated the British. These things being so, I can see that the southern chance of success is ~~far~~ likely to be greater than that of the English in 1781. I wish it were otherwise but wishes are good for nothing in such contingencies.

As to the estimate which the English have generally formed that the object is for the maintenance of the bounds of the Union and for the abolition of slavery that view is amply carried out by the whole tenor of the abolition papers. The Lord Liberator expressly complains that not 5 papers in the North regard abolition in any other light than as a necessary strategic measure. Just in any degree as one demanded by justice & humanity. Good! and our friends see that the abolition of slavery must be the upshot of the struggle — slavery must go to the wall in a blaze — or it will crumble for want of northern help & patronage — but when it to

only because the Northern people ceased to think it necessary to keep it up — not because their convictions — perhaps towards the colored race had been materially altered for the better.

That the Scotch gentleman spoke of the Trent affair as a grand opportunity is likely enough. If nations were to be put together by the ears on account of the speeches of fools the gates of the temple of Janus must always be open or might be taken off their hinges & ~~put~~ be sawn up for firewood. I firmly believe that the prevailing English feeling respecting that affair was & is one of regret — ~~[illegible]~~ on selfish as well as on American grounds. War is costly in blood & in treasure — it is permanently alienating between England & America, for it is like civil war — and all the past struggles between the two countries have left deep scars on both sides, but particularly deep & rankerous ones in America where they are according to the custom of the existing system mentally kept open by those unchristian commemorations which are sheerly to be deprecated in a moral point of view, no matter where are kept up.

In my opinion the fairer way to look at the Trent affair is, "Pray would America have taken it if the Trent had been her own vessel & the Secretaries a British one?" If Mason & Slidell had been refugees from rebels & not Southern rebels?" In my opinion they would have had no two words about it. They strictly maintained the right of their flag to freedom from British interference when carrying on the slave trade & would they not have been as strenuous on behalf of political refugees?

31/12/61

I have no special admiration for England or the English people. With handsome national vanity I like our own countrymen better. We have fewer crimes, less poverty & far more social & domestic virtue. But let us have fair play. Putting aside the rash, foolish general speeches of individuals who may dislike the democratic government of the Northern States or be unreasonably irritated by Northern threats or bravados, I don't see what the English Government should have done seeing the beginning of the end was that they have not done. When it is generally admitted by all reasonable people even in the U.S. that the recognition of the Southern belligerents was inevitable & that there was no alternative unless we had joined in the war, a step which the North emphatically repudiated any desire that we should do. For the language of portions of our press we are no more to blame than you are for that of the Herald & others of your newspapers. I have always thought that owing chiefly to the circumstances of their education there was infinitely less international hatred towards America in England than there is towards England in America. I firmly believe that if the war had been a bona fide anti-slavery war instead of a war which may turn out on the slavery question by accident & against the intention of the Northern people, a degree of enthusiasm would have been called forth in England like that which attended with breathless interest & sympathy the progress of Garibaldi from Marsala to Naples. Nothing more than the testimony of the Liberator & Standard last published is needed to show that abolition is looked to rather as an unfortunate necessity than as a glorious & joyful accompaniment of the war. How else could a Northern merchant be kept in prison in a Northern

city under a reduction sentence for breach of the fugitive slave law? How could northern generals return fugitives to their rebel owners under circumstances of aggravating barbarous & cruelty? How could Parker Pillsbury be mobbed quite lately & his audience expelled in New England? I attribute all this to past teaching — as I do to American teaching the horror expressed in our war hearing of negro emancipation & the strange ignorance of the blessed results of our own West Indian experiment. As to the prejudice against colour there is nothing to choose between the treatment of the few negroes in the northern states & that of the Hindoos off who ranks by the English because they are dark. Indeed the last number of the decidedly anti slavery Spectator (a weekly paper which I earnestly recommend to you for its liberality & enlightened views) it is lamented that contempt of inferior races is an instinct with the so called Anglo Saxon race of mankind

In the U.S. for years past it has been a sure way for any man to obtain popularity if he could make himself the hero of a rebuff to England. The English Government has repeatedly given way and eaten humble pie in order to avoid a war which would be unpatriotic, wasteful & unpopular. I doubt whether they have felt that this kind of treatment may yet be brought to an end at last, especially in a case in which the right of persons to safety under the British flag is in question. If England gave this right up I cant see what she would have to preserve that would be worth fighting for. I dont believe Government or people can surpass for Mason & Slidell in their individual or official capacities

The language of the American papers in reference to it has been of a peculiarly galling kind — such as that Mr Bull must learn to feel of with such affronts — that he should be thankful that Mr Seward was let go — that thanks to Captain Wilkes for his pluck in boarding an unarmed ship of war inferior size to his own & as if he had performed a most heroic and honorable act in compromising his own government by a high handed act in which he coherced Britain by risking no personal risks whatever. If such irreproachable conduct were a road to honor & reward under other governments what would the normal state of international intercourse

In expressing myself thus at length although I am so unfortunate as to differ from you I am not conscious of any proslavery tendency, if any they had darken to the crimes, cruelties & bad faith of the Slave States, or of any but cordial good will & respect for every true hearted abolitionist in America.

As to the U.S. being too large, I certainly think that the Northerners might find as safe a life for a union with so many rattlesnakes as with the slaveholders & that if they could have honorably effected a quiet separation from them without war it would have been better for them in many respects. But I doubt whether this would have been really practicable & it would certainly not have been better for the slaves — and until all allegiance to slavery be eliminated from the politics & public opinion there can be tranquillity for them.

Great denunciation was felt in England at the Morrill tariff — and naturally felt — for the bread of thousands in England was affected by it

but the Americans have as good a right to their protective system as we have to our free trade, which was as little comprehended by us thirty or forty years since as it is now in America.

Until the course of the Northern Government & people has been decidedly anti-slavery & anti-slavery objects & principles than ~~they have~~ it has hitherto appeared, I think it most unfair to stigmatize the natural jealousy of Englishmen for the ~~the~~ honors of their flag as the symbol of the national right of asylum as a piratical jealousy.

As you have expressed yourself with great candour I have done the same. I hope you & expect you to hearkening that I would have much rather we could regard either a reluctance to intervene to us both — but I am sure you would prefer me to state my real sentiments rather than I should twist or conceal them out of deference to your preferences.

I have endeavored to correct my own impression by conferring them with those of clear minded, long headed friends of my own who have no hobby, share little of my impulsive temperament — but I do not find that their conclusions materially differ from ~~my own~~ those I had independently formed from my own sources of information — and they are I believe as honestly anti-slavery & as free from bias as any people living.

Mrs Chapman has thanked me for my letter in the Standard & has asked me to continue them. I have repeatedly requested the Editor to put in nothing of mine from courtesy to me or if he thought my language or sentiments inopportune. They are a free-will offering & the only reward I wish for is to be able to be of some use to the cause. I talk as ~~frankly~~ frankly in the Standard as I do to you.

3/11/2/61

There today (not having time to finish my letter) I sent off several of the last Standards to you by book post with a very three papers cover. They go by book post for 2d being under half an ounce. We live out here at Fernhill about 7 miles from Great Bromwich that house which we now shall occupy. We are under the brow of the Three Rocks mountain in a very pretty country locality. The house is two stories with 5 bed rooms, three sitting rooms, two kitchens & abundant etcetera. The furniture is very simple and the ornaments mostly portraits of abolitionists. We have no grand orators & those we have are generally no better off than ourselves in worldly fortune. Outside my own family I have almost no intimate associates and I spend nearly all my waking hours when not engaged in business or in coming to Hros in reading & writing. I read the American papers. Carpenter, Rev. S. Hayes, Jenn & Gross & Miss Chapman write to me more frequently than any other of my American friends.

I know that you are familiar with Headbeaters Cottage Developer. I know Mary Headbeaten very well. She kept "Arcade of Ballston" her native village, for fully 50 years. A daughter of hers is publishing selections from their Hros mothers correspondence — other editing though nominally hers is really done by Mrs Webb Hayes. It is a job of considerable delicacy & difficulty to select from such a Chronicle the scraps that are likely to interest survivors. The selection & proof reading often carry me back with pensive recollections of the days of my boyhood. The vol. of letters wh contains some unpublished letters of Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton, Mrs Headbeaten father, & Great Grandfather to my Son Alfred's lately married wife.

It is time for me to bring this long long letter to a close. How delighted I would be to have a good long talk with you. I can hardly imagine a greater intellectual pleasure – such as I enjoyed so thoroughly in Versailles in 1869, before you had the heavy care upon your heart which must have weighed you down so much. Sir this reminds me of one of the most beloved friends of my boyhood, Betsey Shackleton, a niece of Mary Leadbeater, who had a similar affliction to bear in the death of an angelic sister for whom she lamented many years with inextinguishable grief. That sister was mother to the Mrs Sidney whom you may recall to see you at the Waterloo Hotel in Leamington when you arrived from America, & who has now been for ten years settled in the State of Ohio in what is known as the Western Reserve. It is a pity that such a large number of women as she is should be buried in the woods away from all congenial society.

There was the bells in Dublin on the anniversary rejoicing in 1862 which I hope may bring a reasonable degree of happiness to us all, peace to America, liberty to the slaves, freedom to Hungary, deliverance to Austria, Rome & Venice to Italy, & a happy deliverance to the Queen of Bulletin

Yours ever affectionately

Richd Webb

Ms.A.9.2.30.80